



## James B. Colgate Wrecked on Black Friday

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The name "Black Friday" was given to the date of October 20, 1916, after a violent storm sank ships and ended lives on Lake Erie. The **James B. Colgate** and her crew were among the victims, and only the captain survived.

A cargo of hard coal had come aboard at Buffalo and was consigned to Fort William, ON (now Thunder Bay). Despite a rising wind and the sound of waves crashing the outer break-wall, the vessel cast off lines and departed on its final voyage shortly after midnight October 20.

Lake Erie, the shallowest of the five Great Lakes, responded to the high winds with towering seas that pounded the **James B. Colgate** as it made its way west. That evening the ship

developed a list and, within hours, slid bow first to the bottom of the lake.

Without radio communications and unable to launch the lifeboats, the crew struggled in the frigid waters to cling to anything that floated free. Three men, including the captain, found a small life raft. The cruel waves flipped their flimsy craft several times, and by morning only the captain was alive.

Fortunately, the lake settled down, and he survived the day and another night before the crew of the carferry **Marquette & Bessemer No. 2** spotted the almost lifeless body on the raft and pulled him to safety.

Others also perished on the lake that day. The lumber carrier **Marshall F.**

**Butter** sank, but all were rescued. The schooner **D.L. Filer** went down and only one sailor, who clung to the mast, was rescued. Finally, the **Merida**, with 23 on board, was lost with all hands.

The **James B. Colgate** was built at West Superior, WI and launched on September 21, 1892. The 320 foot long whaleback design bulk carrier sailed for the American Steel Barge Company, Bessemer Steamship Company, Pittsburgh Steamship Company, and Standard Transit before being lost. It is shown in a photo from the collection of Captain Ken Lowes.

Divers located the hull of **James B. Colgate** in 1991. It rests upside down, some 12 miles southwest of Erieau, ON. ⚓



**James B. Colgate**

(Photograph courtesy of Skip Gilham)